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FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE

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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2019

TAGS: MOPS PREL PGOV PARM MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA SOLDIERS SERVING IN IRAQ

REF: STATE 96122

Classified By: CDA Thomas Navratil for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) CDA conveyed points in reftel para. 8 to PM Gruevski on Sept. 11, emphasizing deep U.S. appreciation for the outstanding service that Macedonia's soldiers have been providing as part of coalition forces in Iraq. Gruevski asked several clarifying questions and understands that due to the improved security situation, Iraq desires to have far fewer coalition partners operating there. He responded positively to keeping Macedonian forces in Iraq until the end of 2008, then withdrawing them.

¶2. (S) Gruevski asked if it was acceptable to brief this to his regularly scheduled cabinet meeting Sep. 12, but agreed not to when CDA requested that he keep this planning confidential at this time.

¶3. (S) He expressed concern that when news emerges that Macedonian forces will no longer serve in Iraq after 2008, the media and opposition may charge that Gruevski is pulling out due to conflicts with the U.S. government, and sought assurance that when this is public he can state that this decision is in full consultation and agreement with the U.S. CDA responded that he can, and that we will publicly express our appreciation for Macedonia's contributions and promptly correct any contentions that the Macedonian troop withdrawal was unilateral or uncoordinated.

¶4. (S) CDA said that the USG is considering future needs in the NATO training mission in Iraq, as well as additional needs in Afghanistan, and that it is possible that we would seek Macedonian military participation in either or both. He agreed to consider any such requests, and asked how many forces we had in mind. CDA replied that these ideas were still under consideration and that we would coordinate as soon as we could. CDA noted that NAVEUR ADM Fitzgerald will visit Skopje next week and may have further insights on our thinking to share.

¶5. (U) Recommendations: to express appreciation for Macedonia's sustained troop deployments in Iraq, we recommend:

-- letter from President Bush to President Crvenkovski, as head of state and commander in chief;

-- letter from President Bush to Prime Minister Gruevski, as head of government;

-- on camera public statement of appreciation by Secretary Gates during his Oct. 7-8 visit to Macedonia.

¶6. (S) Action request: please advise whether we expect allies to be able to announce the drawdown publicly prior to the Sep. 23 U.S.-GoI event with allies at the UN.

Navratil